

Press-Gazette photos by Ken Wesely

Workers at the Green Bay Canning Corp. plant watch for problems as tons of sweet corn kernels pour through a hose into a tanker.

Sweet corn pouring in

Corn is being piled outside Green Bay Canning Corp., 1425 Main St., while two more weeks of processing remain.

A large, plastic hose is used to fill a tank-truck outside the plant which will carry the kernels to Beaver Dam for freezing. The corn then will be returned and later mixed with peas and beans, which have already been frozen, and fresh carrots, potatoes and lima beans for a vegetable mix.

The truck contains about 35,000 pounds of corn when full. Four truckloads a day are sent to Beaver Dam.

The peak harvest time for corn is Labor Day through the beginning of October. Mixed vegetables will follow corn processing. The plant will continue processing until about Oct. 10.



Sweet corn piles up at the canning plant as the harvest continues.

Few changes seen at Green Bay Canning under new owners

By Harry Maier

Press-Gazette

Green Bay Canning Corp. is under new ownership, but the change on the outside will be hard to detect.

The new owner is Stokely USA, a family-dominated food processor based in Oconomowoc.

Frank Zimonick, who had been president of Green Bay Canning, now is general manager.

Stokely has no plans to move in any administrative personnel.

Stephen Theobald, vice president of administration for Stokely, said the company does not foresee any immediate changes for Green Bay.

"Part of our corporate strategy is to expand our market share, either through more capacity or buying other companies," he said, adding, "Green Bay was that chance, similar to our purchase of American National Corp. in Iowa last December."

Stokely now operates 15 plants.

For Green Bay Canning, Theobald said, the purchase will give its sales force the opportunity to sell some products it didn't have before, such as frozen vegetables for microwave cooking.

Green Bay Canning will continue to operate as an independent company, and even will be a competitor among other Stokely plants.

In addition to Zimonick, key personnel include Bill Verhasselt, office/traffic manager; Ed Brien, sales manager; Bob

Inside business

Jenquin, production manager, and Wally Vandenhouten, route products manager.

The Zimonick name has been linked to Green Bay Canning since the 1930s, when Frank Zimonick Sr. became president.

The company, which was founded May 16, 1907, experienced financial difficulties and was reorganized in April 1934, with Zimonick as president.

Frank Jr. graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1951 and worked at Zimonick Bros., another canning company, before joining Green Bay Canning Corp. as president in 1983.

There are about 35 employees on a year-round basis and another 100 during the harvest and canning season.

Green Bay Canning has keyed its operations to working with farmers in the immediate area, mostly Brown, Oconto, Kewaunee, Door and Manitowoc counties, although some products are purchased from growers in central Wisconsin.

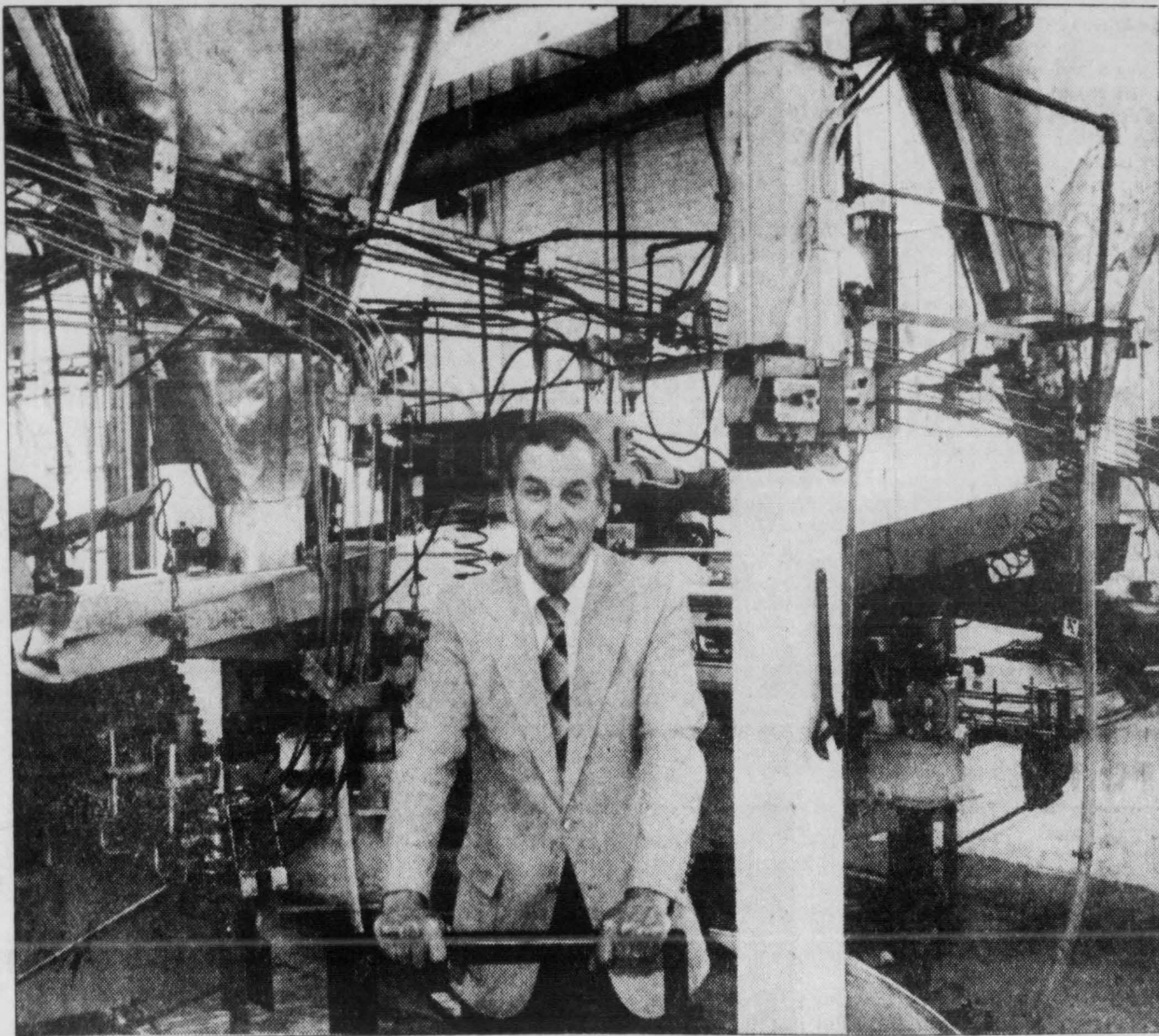
"About 75 farmers who work 4,500 acres of land do business with us annually," Zimonick said.

About 95 percent of those growers are with the company each season, he added.

Some growers will produce several crops including peas, corn and beans.

Primarily, they raise peas, snap beans

Please see **Canning/B-7**



Press-Gazette photo by Ken Wesely

Canning change: Stokely USA, Oconomowoc, is the new owner of Green Bay Canning Corp., 1425 Main St. Frank Zimonick, former president of Green Bay Canning and now general manager,

is shown in the area of the canning operations. The company has the capacity to produce approximately 400 cans of peas, beans or corn a minute. Sales last year were about \$6.5 million.

From B-6

☐ Canning

and sweet corn. From central Wisconsin, the company buys carrots and celery.

Production runs to about 15,000 tons of vegetables annually, broken down to 2,000 tons of peas, 1,500 tons of beans, 9,000 tons of corn and 2,000 tons of carrots.

Green Bay Canning can turn out canned vegetables at the rate of 400 cans a minute.

In the past five years, total acreage has increased about 20 percent, a direct result of improved sales, Zimonick said.

Green Bay Canning primarily sells to large food chains, mainly through its own sales staff and food brokers.

"Over the years, we have built up a reputation for service and quality products," Zimonick said.

Some of the customers have been with the company for 25 years.

Service is a key, he noted, adding, "We can ship product within a day or two if necessary. Our niche in the marketplace is our service."

Zimonick said a major share of the company's production is directed at top label lines, which call for high quality.

"The market is more demanding. The consumer is calling for quality, which means we constantly have to upgrade our products," Zimonick said.

"Quality is tied to the time of harvesting," he explained, meaning that harvesting has to be done a day or two after the vegetable is ready.

Fields are checked daily as part of the quality control program.

Federal standards have been set for color and flavor, with a rating of 90 or above qualifying for fancy; 80-89, extra standard; and 70-79, standard.

"It all starts in the field," Zimon-

ick said, "with final samples of the vegetables taken a day or two before harvest to ensure the top standards will be met."

New seed varieties constantly are being evaluated.

The company has completed planting its pea crop and is well into planting corn. Peas will be harvested in late July, marking a 60-day growing season.

The farmer is responsible for getting the soil ready, with Green Bay Canning crews handling both the planting and harvesting.

Payments are based both on quantity and quality.

It's all done on schedule to meet with the production capabilities at the plant, Zimonick said.

Sales for Green Bay Canning mainly are centered in the upper Midwest and the East Coast. Last year, sales were about \$6½ million, which Zimonick considered to be a good year.

Stokely, which had been a closely held company, went public in October 1985 with the sale of 2.3 million shares.

The company originally was known as Oconomowoc Canning Co. In June 1983, it purchased Stokely-Van Camp and its six canning plants, along with the right to market products to supermarkets under the "Stokely's Finest" label.

In 1984, the company bought out the Stokely-Van Camp trade names and the trademarks and in January 1985, changed its name to Stokely USA.

Stokely markets its products in 24 states, principally in the Midwest and Southeast with annual volume of more than \$159 million.

Canning is big business for Wisconsin, which ranks as the No. 1 vegetable producer in the United States.

Last year, Wisconsin canners produced vegetables and fruit valued at \$600 million and employed 21,000 persons.

Old canning plant to get conversion

Facility will house shops, apartments

BY ELAINE KAUF
PRESS-GAZETTE

The old Green Bay Canning plant at 1425 Main St. used to turn out thousands of cans of peas, beans, corn and carrots daily.

The plant shut down five years ago.

Its two-story brick structure will now have new life as an up-scale business and apartment development.

The \$2.5 million renovation project announced Tuesday is also a boost for the Olde Main Street business district, which seeks to preserve historic structures while encouraging commercial development.

"Something like these loft apartments, the retail ... will just add to what we're trying to do," said Sue Bessert, program manager of Olde Main Street. "What we'd really like to see there is restoration of older buildings."

Developers Michael Schwantes and Gary Van Sistine unveiled their renovation plans Tuesday. They're preserving the site's history by calling it The Cannery on Olde Main.

"It's another real positive development for the area," said John Hopfensperger, chairman of Olde



Ken Behrend/Press-Gazette

The former Green Bay Canning plant on Main Street is slated to be converted to retail shops and apartments. A catering and specialty foods business, a'Bravo, already occupies part of the building.

Main Street and owner of Direct Development, which has done a similar project in the area called Olde Town Crossing.

With limited opportunities on Main to convert space into loft apartments, the project is unique, Hopfensperger said. "They're going to be wonderful," he said. "I think you'll see more of it."

The Cannery's first tenant, a'Bravo, opened in November in the plant's front space.

Owners Julie and Brenda Beaudoin are excited about having neighbors for their specialty foods and catering business.

Julie Beaudoin said opening on Broadway was an option, but with the downtown traffic crossing the

railroad and bridges opening over the Fox River, she and her sister kept looking.

"There were just too many variables with the train and the bridge," she said. Then they found the cannery. "We thought, this is perfect for us," she said. "We're nice and centralized."

"This area has tremendous potential," Brenda Beaudoin said. "It's only going to get better."

The former Green Bay Canning plant was built in 1907 by the Zimonick family on what's known as Three Corners, the intersection of Main, Baird, Cedar and Morrow streets.

The company produced canned peas, beans, corn and carrots for

large food chains.

Stokely USA of Oconomowoc bought out the company in 1987. In 1989, the plant added a new frozen vegetable facility to its fresh pack operation.

Stokely, which merged with Chiquita Brands International Inc. in 1997, closed the plant in 1995.

"We walked through the building about six, seven months ago and saw a lot of potential," Van Sistine said.

Schwantes has renovated downtown buildings including the Prange's warehouse on Washington Street, which now houses bars and restaurants.

"I'm certainly pleased to see the



Schwantes
Renovated
Prange's building



Van Sistine
Cannery has a
lot of potential

kind of renovation that's being planned here," Green Bay Mayor Paul Jadin said. "You're ... taking blight and turning it into something that has more value."

The first floor of the Cannery, 22,000 square feet, will include up to 10 businesses, and rent for about \$10 per square foot, Schwantes said.

Work will start in three to four weeks with completion in six months, he said.

Renovation will start next week on another part of the Three Corners complex, the former Three Corners Motors/Dehn's Ice Cream building, for a floral shop, Schwantes said.

That building will be connected to the cannery for the retail section.

The project's second phase, to be finished next year, includes 17 apartments on the upper level's 20,000 square feet.

"We think the market is ripe for loft apartments," Schwantes said. Depending on the size, the units will rent for \$400 to \$800 per month, he said.